

This is historical material, "frozen in time." The web site is no longer updated and links to external web sites and some internal pages will not work.



# THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

[Home](#) > [News & Policies](#) > [March 2004](#)

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
March 24, 2004

## Interview of Dr. Condoleezza Rice by Tom Brokaw, NBC

6:30 P.M. EST

Q Let's begin with that statement by Mr. Clarke, apologizing to the families, taking responsibility, asking for forgiveness. Will the President ever consider making such a statement?

DR. RICE: Tom, everybody feels that what happened to us on September 11th was clearly a deep tragedy. The President has encountered a multitude of families and families of the victims. He has talked about their loss being our loss. This was a terrible loss for the country. But we need to recognize that good people in the Clinton administration and in the first 200-plus days of the Bush administration were doing what we knew how to do to try and protect the country.

Since September 11th we have been able to do things in an all-out war on terrorism that the President has launched, that we hope will prevent further attacks on the United States. We are safer now, but not yet safe. But the events of September 11th, while tragic, probably could not have been prevented by the kinds of steps that were being discussed today. That's the hard fact.

Q Let me ask about executive privilege. You've been meeting with the commission in private, but you will not go before this very public meeting, citing separation of powers, executive privilege. But your predecessors have gone before Congress in the past. Even President Ford testified about his pardon of Richard Nixon. Executive privilege is really a flexible concept. Why not go to the President on this issue that is so profoundly important to America, and say, I should be testifying?

DR. RICE: Tom, I would like nothing better than to be able to testify before the commission. I have spent more than four hours with the commission. I'm prepared to go and talk to them again, anywhere, any time, anyplace, privately. But I have to be responsible and to uphold the separation of powers between the executive and the legislature. It is a matter of whether the President can count on good confidential advice from his staff.

Over time, there have been cases, mostly related to -- they've been related to allegations of wrongdoing of one kind or another. This is not that kind of case. It would set a bad precedent. But I want the American people to know the story. That's why I'm here. After all, this President has a very good story to tell about the first 230-plus days of his administration and what he did in the war on terrorism, and certainly since September 11th, the war on terrorism that he has launched since they launched war on us on that terrible day.

Q Dr. Rice, with all due respect, I think a lot of people are watching this tonight saying, well, if she can appear on television, write commentaries, but she won't appear before the commission under oath. It just doesn't seem to make sense.

DR. RICE: Tom, I would like nothing better, but there is a constitutional principle at stake here. I'm here before the American people. We're not hiding anything. You can ask me anything that you want; any journalist can ask me anything that you want. The commission can ask me anything that it wants in private. It can put it in its report. The public will know everything that I know. This is a matter of constitutional principle. It is not a matter of personal preference for me.

Q Mr. Clarke said today that terrorism was the highest priority of the Clinton administration. It was important to you, but it was not the highest priority. Any student, I think, of the early days of your administration might have thought that China, Russia, Iraq, missile defense systems were probably higher on the President's agenda.

DR. RICE: Tom, I just don't think that the record bears out Dick Clarke's assertion. In fact, on January 25th, in response to a question from me to my staff to tell me what we should be worrying about, what we should be doing, he sent us a set of ideas that would perhaps help to roll back al Qaeda over a three-to-five-year period. We acted on those ideas very quickly. And what's very interesting is that, while Dick Clarke now says that we ignored his ideas, or we didn't follow them up, in August of 2002, in a press interview, he said that we had, in fact, acted on those ideas. So he can't have it both ways.

We were acting on issues like arming the Predator, so that we could have a reconnaissance plane that could also strike the target, cutting down the time between sighting a target and being able to hit it. The President increased counterterrorism funding several-fold in order to be more aggressive.

And most importantly, the President set out a new direction for American policy in the war on terrorism, to give us stronger, more coherent policies, and policies that were more robust, to eliminate al Qaeda, not just to roll it back. That strategy really did not take very long. In the interim, the administration was pursuing all of the avenues that the Clinton administration had been pursuing before. So it's just not right to say that this President was not focused on terrorism.

He met every morning with his Director of Central Intelligence and some 46 of his daily briefings were about issues related to al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. So we were very active in the fight against al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, and preparing a strategy to become even more active.

Q Dr. Rice, I hope we'll have an opportunity to go over these issues again in the future, whether or not you appear before the commission. I do thank you for being here tonight.

DR. RICE: Thank you very much, Tom.

END 6:40 P.M. EST